

BAYARD TAYLOR.

HIS POETRY AND LITERARY CAREER.

PART II.

I.

TAYLOR'S versatility is shown in his lyrical remains. Much of his poetry does not bear its maker's hand-mark so distinctly as that of Longfellow or Whittier is wont to do. His subjects and modes of treatment are exceedingly varied, and the former may be assorted in groups,—the classical pieces, the dithyrambic lyrics, the poems of travel, and those of hearth and home. In any mood he was apt to reach a certain standard of merit; he rarely failed. But there was one field—though he scarcely seemed to realize its value—so much his own as to breed for him a number of rough imitators. From it he made such studies of the rural scenes and characters he best knew, as "John Reid," "The Old Pennsylvania Farmer," and that lovely ballad, unexcelled in truth and tenderness of feeling—"The Quaker Widow":

"Thee finds me in the garden, Hannah,—come in!
 'Tis kind of thee
 To wait until the Friends were gone, who came
 to comfort me.
 The still and quiet company a peace may give,
 indeed,
 But blessed is the single heart that comes to us
 at need.

"Come, sit thee down! Here is the bench where
 Benjamin would sit
 On First-day afternoons in spring, and watch the
 swallows flit;
 He loved to smell the sprouting box, and hear the
 pleasant bees
 Go humming round the lilacs and through the
 apple-trees.

"I think he loved the spring—not that he cared
 for flowers. Most men
 Think such things foolishness—but we were first
 acquainted then,
 One spring: the next, he spoke his mind; the
 third, I was his wife,
 And in the spring (it happened so) our children
 entered life."

Some of the touches are perfect:

"'Tis hard to change so late in life, but we must
 be resigned;
 The Lord looks down contentedly upon a willing
 mind."

The poet more rarely expressed that passion which feeds itself on rapture or heart-

break and the ecstasy of despair. Even his noon-day health and manliness blunted his delicacy of touch. One might well refer, in illustration of the difference between the suggestive, idealistic use of a theme and the reverse, to Heine's couplets on "The Palm and the Pine" and Taylor's longer poem with that title. And yet, when he felt with his whole heart, he could be not only refined, but highly imaginative, as in "Euphorion,"—a poem addressed to friends who had lost a dreamy and beautiful child:

"For, through the crystal of your tears,
 His love and beauty fairer shine;
 The shadows of advancing years
 Draw back, and leave him all divine.

"And Death, that took him, cannot claim
 The smallest vesture of his birth,—
 The little life, a dancing flame
 That hovered o'er the hills of earth,—

"The finer soul, that unto ours
 A subtle perfume seemed to be,
 Like incense blown from April flowers
 Beside the scarred and thorny tree,—

"The wondering eyes, that ever saw
 Some fleeting mystery in the air,
 And felt the stars of evening draw
 His heart to silence, childhood's prayer!"

These stanzas are at the top mark, I think, of Taylor's lyrical genius. The man who could write them, and who composed the Bedouin Song and the Pennsylvanian idyls, was an American poet whose fame should be dear to his countrymen. But he did much more. Of what kind, and under what conditions? Here comes in the lesson of his life as a poet, and it is chiefly as a poet that we are considering him.

Authors are most sure to give us something of value when they render the feeling of localities to which they belong. A sympathetic poet is in danger of losing his birthright through much knowledge of the world at large. Shelley wandered everywhere, but never was there a poet more subjective. He found in the haunted chambers of his own soul the music, the prophesy, which he uttered afar. The murmur of the Appenines, the mist of the Eugeanean Hills, were merely the voice and drapery of his own imagining, and with

him the ideal was the real. Byron, again, used all skies, all persons, as the mirror of himself, and forced every region to contribute to the study of his personal nature. Brummagem Byrons more than once have aped his princely progress, but Taylor was too honest and sincere to figure among these. His Byronism ended with his youth. He was patriotic, always American, and should have exhibited the national spirit in his verse no less than in his career. I think he was a poet whose mark would have been still higher had his relations been confined, if not to the section that gave him birth, at most to his own land and people.

To venture, for once, upon comparisons, I would say that the native qualities of Taylor were not unlike those of Burns and Whittier; that these three poets were more similar, as they came from the mold, than any others whom I call to mind. Burns was a healthy country lad, full of the prodigal force of Nature, blown on by her breezes, nurtured by her soil, thrilled by poetic emotions as he felt the rich sap of youth coursing through his veins. His influences were those of his own people. His first efforts imitated the didactic plodding of the "Caledonian Bards." When somewhat matured, he awoke to the beauty of the true Scottish minstrelsy, and adapted his own song to it. Suppose that opportunities for travel, wider culture, varied reading, the mastery of languages, had been given him. One nail drives out another. He might have been hampered with his acquisitions; his Muse would have subdued her strength in diverse strains; he would no longer have been the fine, untrammelled specialist,—and might have wholly lost his native wood-notes wild.

Whittier, another national poet, owes his fame, as one of the most genuine, to his seclusion—voluntary or involuntary—and to his presentation of the themes and feeling nearest the heart of New England. His work has the greater value because it pertains to these distinctive things, and thus is a specific addition to American song. His early pieces, like those of Burns, were artificial. It was not until after growth and fervid conviction that his lips were really touched with fire.

It was Taylor's good fortune, as a man who would live his life,—his ill fortune, it may be, as a poet,—to obtain the culture and experience for which his youth had longed. We admire his pluck and advent-

ture, but lament what was lost to poetry. At just the time when his fine spirit, bound within a home range, would have made the most of its surroundings, he was able to travel, and to gratify without stint his love of action and observation. Unconsciously, his Muse became bewildered. His gift and his poetic yearning were always by him; but surely he lost much in exchange for what he gained. One can readily conceive the lyrical genius of Whittier as subject to be diffused or perplexed under similar conditions. The question lies between personal attainment and the extreme utilization of an artist's special gift. Taylor chose the former. He said, "If I have any ambition, it is to enjoy as large a store of experience as this earth can furnish." Circumstances aided him in his choice. As a youth, he thought little of the effect upon his poetic career, or possibly thought he was promoting it. Later on, however "rich and ample" his life, he felt a sense of uneasiness. He cared most of all, in his heart of hearts, to be a poet, and saw that, while going afar to invoke the Muse, he had given her the less chance to seek him, as she sought out one who said, "The Poetic Genius of my country found me at the plow and threw her inspiring mantle over me." When she does visit her favorite, it is not safe to bid her wait for a more convenient season. She may hide herself when summoned, or permit a misleading phantom to take her place.

Choose between the ideal and the actual—such is the alternative of art. Few can eat their cake and have it, too. Delight of life and action has turned aside many a swift runner, as I have shown in reference to Domett and Horne, poets of a less indomitable industry than Taylor's, who found the joys of adventure even more alluring than he did, and dallied with their art for long and almost irremediable spaces.

Whatever may be said of the benefits and disadvantages of culture, it often has been a practical injury to the poet—since no one is sure of life's full limit—to set before him too high and broad an ideal. It may not always be best to aim at the sun. We ask of a man the one thing he can do better than other men, and often, as in the legend of Gaspar Becerra, "that is best which lieth nearest." Then there are hindrances born of success itself, and to these Taylor was unusually subjected. He became involved with the literary life of New York, and at a trying time. It was just early enough for him to receive a good word from Poe, and

late enough for him to witness the rout of the "literati." Even a sham literary feeling may be better than no feeling at all. The pursuit of letters now was mainly left to the Boston writers, while the New York wits and authors betook themselves to journalism, and with material success.

Has New York gained since then as a literary center? Yes, and no. It is now the base from which our authors draw their supplies. The great journals, the most profitable magazines, the largest publishing houses, are located there. It is the chief center of distribution, and will so remain until some future period shall establish a differentiation between the typical literatures of this vast country, and number as many great centers of distribution as there shall be characteristic sections. But the atmosphere,—the public feeling which alone can foster rising art and make its workmen glad and creative,—this gathers more slowly. Authors are tolerated, respected, valued as accessories; but not always understood, nor often intrusted with the care of important movements. New York has a sufficiency of writers and of literary elements for the needs of many smaller cities; but the former are without concert of action, and do not feel themselves sustained by that sympathetic interest which, for example, encourages the music of Naples, the art of Paris or Rome. What intellectual quality exists must be found among the writers, artists, savants,—of themselves numerous enough to make an audience or colonize a university town. New York is great in material progress, generous in charities; but still too practical even to affect an æsthetic sentiment. True, her wealthy classes are groping toward the comprehension of what is beautiful. They have schools of design, and are surpassing not only the troglodytes, but our more immediate ancestors, in mural decoration. But what is intellectually fine we have yet to pursue with any general ardor. The city took a pride in Bryant, for instance, as a man and as a picturesque figure on state occasions; but how many of his townsmen had read the most of his poems, or cared to read them? Meanwhile, in Boston, phrases, such as "Emerson says," or "Lowell says," have been a staple part of ordinary conversation. Herein is no reason for complaint; all is as it should be. If individuals are not coddled in New York, they at least have an equal chance, and there are not lacking assurances of a speedy and rich development. Already it is the fashion to seek

admission to the Century and the University clubs. The cry of "Asses and savants to the center!" is no longer possible. The present longing for æsthetic luxury in New York is a sign that her ideal advance has begun. Her golden age of art and literature cannot be far distant; the public temper will of itself breed her artists and poets.

Taylor's lot was thus cast in a somewhat uncongenial city, and he often found himself praised and courted where he needed the stimulus of intelligent sympathy. Again, he took to journalism, and it was his mainstay through life. During the last thirty years, New York journalism has absorbed much of our best talent, and well it might, for it demands the best. No severer test can be applied to a writer than that of his ability to furnish leading articles regularly. More than one, who has succeeded easily as a bookwright or essayist, has found his equipment and his power of composition inadequate to the off-hand production of compact, polished, well-informed leaders, such as are needed for the editorial pages of our great newspapers. Journalism is an art; but under our system it brings little beyond his weekly stipend to the sub-journalist. The stipend is sure, and that means a great deal to one who lives by his pen. Newspapers thus far have supplied the readiest market to a writer, and the magazines next to them. In a chapter upon Hood, London's journalist-poet, I have claimed that the task of daily writing for the press, while a good staff, is a poor crutch; it diffuses the heat of authorship, checks idealism, retards the construction of masterpieces. Besides, it brings an author into attrition with members of the craft who possibly know him so familiarly as to under-rate him. He is subjected to local jealousies, to the over-praise of the newspaper which befriends him, and sometimes to the unjust or ungenerous treatment of rival sheets. All this may be thought an evil peculiar to New York, and one which we shall outgrow. But the same phenomena are visible in the matured newspaper-life of the capitals of England and France, and must be accepted as part of a journalist's warfare and surroundings.

Newspaper-work, then, to which Taylor owed so much of his current reputation, also restricted his advance as a creative author. He always was compelled, by this and by lecturing, to hold the popularity he had gained, and to obtain the means of carrying out his scheme of life. As a man of note, his

home-pride grew upon him. He chose to realize a dream of possessing a slightly house and broad acres in Kennett,—a manor-home where he could place his parents, and find a retreat in times of rest. All this he did, in his early prime; such a man can have anything for which he will pay the price. Its cost to him, no doubt, was a lessening of his quality as a poet. Even in 1854 he had begun to lecture, and the practice became a lucrative source of income. Like journalism, it broke up his art-life, which was renewed at unfrequent intervals. A pressure of social and professional duties—meetings, speeches, correspondence—soon bore upon him severely. Under it he made a good fight; hopeful, generous, considerate, trying to do something in a field where the laborers were too few. How gladly would he have exchanged it for one of thought and imaginative work! But men do not escape from tasks they once assume, and he had undertaken to earn a large income and survey the world, on the one hand, and to hold the Muse by her pinions on the other. His poetry had to be composed "between spells" and on the wing; more than all, the versatile habit of his life became a second nature to him.

One need not dwell upon the desirableness of calm and seclusion for the production of the best literature. With individuals, as with nations, stirring periods of action are not favorable to idealistic art. There is much unfairness, however, in the blame to which public men in this country are subjected for their overwork. This is rather a matter of necessity than of choice. People in the old world largely inherit their means and methods from their forbears; new men, even there, often have the habit of overwork fixed upon them by the time their footholds are secured. But the statesmen and thinkers of Europe start with assured incomes more commonly than do our own, and are not forced to earn their bread as they go along. Our Wilsons, Evartses, Curtises, have had to consider first the means of living, and to be statesmen or writers in addition. Our Eastern Brahmins, happily, have had for the most part resources which they have enlarged by the help of such gentle, scholarly pursuits as the service of a university affords. They have shown themselves quite willing to indulge a spirit of restfulness and calm. So long as Americans who do not inherit estates have the Anglo-Saxon pride and domestic tenderness, they will be tempted to do work elsewhere than in a garret, and rarely

be able to drive from their minds the thought of its effect upon an income-paying constituency.

II.

SOME years of Taylor's life now were occupied with travel in Europe, north and south. He married in Germany, and his choice was most fortunate. She whose hand he gained was by her talents and acquisitions in every sense his helpmeet,—honoring his genius, in full sympathy with his purposes, for happy years the wise and tender guardian of his household, as she is now the faithful treasurer of his memory and fame. Her translations made his works known to her countrymen; she confirmed his taste for the thought and letters of the Fatherland, and was his constant aid in the study of them.

"The Poet's Journal" was an expression of the happiness for which its author had now exchanged the trials of the past. His bride won and brought to America,—his Lares established in the mansion he soon completed in Kennett,—this poem was the record of past and present feelings. It opens the collective edition of his verse; is a series of lyrics, going through the range of his emotional experiences, and has many touching passages; but to the critical reader, its chief interest is found in its revelation of the author's heart. The prelude, to the mistress of Cedarcroft, is not excelled by anything which follows. Years afterward, he made a still more earnest avowal of his wedded content, in the fine tribute which closes one of his ripest poems:

"With thee was the ceasing of sorrow.
Hope from thy lips I have drawn and subtler
strength from thy spirit,
Sharer of dream and of deed, inflexible conscience
of Beauty!
Though as a grace thou art dear, as a guardian
Muse thou art earnest,
Walking with purer feet the paths of song that I
venture,
Side by side, unwearied, in cheerful encouraging
silence.
Not thy constant woman's heart alone I have
wedded;
One are we made in patience and faith and high
aspiration."

The poet now had a companion in his wanderings. It was not his lot to rest at home; his life of travel, writing, lecturing, means-providing, went forward busily. Duties and honors grew upon him. His patriotic interest in the civil war gave birth to some ringing popular ballads. Shortly

afterward he became our Secretary of Legation at St. Petersburg. We need not follow his public career, nor his periodical returns to the shade of his own chestnuts and tulip-trees. His friend Aldrich compares Taylor's life to a drama, of which the intervals were filled with the music of his poetic work at home. Four-fifths of this he was to enact, and we thought to see his mind's "noblest offspring" with the last; but the curtain fell abruptly, and with the putting out of the lights ended a career that steadily had grown in worth. What there was of it was marked by rare experiences. Among his friends, he counted the wise and gifted of many lands, the most noted people of high and low degree. He had their respect and confidence; and his correspondence with them was most extensive. To know the men he now knew—the world's choicest spirits—was of itself a liberal education. His own letters were delightful, and a sheet covered with his beautiful handwriting and flowing thoughts was a thing to prize and store away. When his biography shall be written, it will be seen how superior his private letters, unrestrained in their fact and fancy and criticism, were to those which he gave the press.

From this date his prose-writings became more sustained. Partly with the thought to try his hand—like Goethe, whom he now began to take as a master—at every kind of work, and partly as a form of literature suited to the times, he essayed novel-writing. His novels sold well, and seemed to hit the average taste. They mostly are realistic transcripts of what he had seen, and contained his own views of what was, and what was lacking, in American life at that time. The plot of "Hannah Thurston" is nothing; the tale was written to illustrate types of character and phases of society,—especially to show up the mock-reforms and isms of the day. The heroine is a Quakeress, admirably drawn, as good and original a creation as is to be found in the whole course of these novels. The hero, like most of their heroes, is something of a muff. Taylor's second novel, "John Godfrey's Fortune," has commonplace and unattractive New York scenes, but these are truthful records of the side of life with which the author first became acquainted in the growing city. "The Story of Kennett" is the cleverest and most artistic of the series; a romance of the old-fashioned kind, and a true idyl of Pennsylvanian country-life in the early prime. Compared

with it, "Joseph and his Friend," the fourth novel, seemed to many people a failure. Meantime, the author's short stories, contributed to magazines, were always fresh and good, as indeed were all his miscellaneous essays. The amount he threw off was remarkable. He wrote prefaces, edited books of travel and biography; did everything a man of letters could do, with equal care and facility. His prose was real prose, simple, clear, good English, if not great. Upon the whole, his literary criticisms seemed to me the ripest and most valuable portion of his prose labor. In them he was compact, learned, writing to the point, and his opinions were just and good with regard to both the spirit and technique of a work. In his later years, his reviews were so catholic, sound of canon and informed as to detail, as to be models; and it became evident that he could have been a great critic, had he devoted himself to criticism alone. He had abundant humor, and this, with his judicial faculty, and his unique talent for parody and burlesque, found charming play in the serio-comic papers which were collected a few years before his death, in a volume called "The Echo Club." So good are its imitations of modern poets that this book takes rank with the "Rejected Addresses,"—so good, in truth, that upon reading the prose dialogue which connects them, we are not surprised to find it made up of some of the most wholesome, kind, and alert criticism that has appeared in recent times.

Few men, not excepting Lewes and Carlyle, have been so well informed as Taylor with respect to German literature. His twelve lectures upon that subject, recently issued from the press, were prepared originally as a university course. For years he was a student of Goethe and Schiller, and their times, and it was the dream of his life to write their biography. To this end he made extended researches in Germany, and collected material under peculiarly auspicious conditions. Had he lived to complete such a work, it would have been a masterpiece. In the midst of his labors, he was enabled to make a complete English translation of "Faust," in the original meters, and to supervise its publication.

III.

THE surprising rapidity with which the two parts of "Faust" were brought out, the original commentary and notes, the avowal that the editor had read all the translations

and commentaries made in any language, were phenomena of that kind which sometimes led people to distrust the thoroughness of Taylor's work. The scholarly character of this performance is now well established. That to which more than one of his predecessors had given a life-time, he apparently completed in three years. He had borne it in mind, however, for two decades, and it was his habit thus to prepare for a work until able to execute it at a dash and with great perfection. Fortunately, the appearance of Brooks's version of the First Part of "Faust," in 1856, had made him postpone his own; when he finally wrote the latter he was equipped by the further studies of many years.

The result was an advance upon any previous rendering of the entire work. It is the standard translation at the present time. The preface demonstrates that poetry sometimes absolutely requires a retention of the original meters for its translation. Illustrations of this are found in Freiligrath's perfect transcript of Scott's "Come as the wind comes," and in Strodtmann's equally fine "Es fällt der Strahl auf Burg und Thal,"—the "Bugle-Song" of Tennyson. To me these seem extreme cases: in others the result might be otherwise. A translator must choose the best method for the work in hand.* It is doubtful whether the test would apply equally well to each of several poets who differ among themselves as widely as Homer, Theocritus, and Pindar.

The characteristics of Taylor's "Faust" are sympathetic quality, rapid poetic handling, absolute fidelity to the text. Now and then his realistic version of the first part has an unusual or quaint effect, detracting from its imaginative design. Hence some of the best portions are those not in rhyme, such as the Cathedral scene, where Margaret is harassed by the Evil Spirit:

"How otherwise was it, Margaret,
When thou, still innocent—"

which is reproduced with thrilling power. The regular verse also is well rendered, Goethe's "Dedication" never having been so well given by any other translator. Its firm, sonorous stanzas are in harmony with Taylor's own manner and poetic feeling:

* Mr. C. Kegan Paul's subsequent translation of the First Part, also upon the lineal and literal plan, and adhering to the original meters and order of rhymes, has qualities which have secured for it much attention.

"Again ye come, ye hovering Forms! I find ye,
As early to my clouded sight ye shone!
Shall I attempt, this once, to seize and bind ye?
Still o'er my heart is that illusion thrown?
Ye crowd more near! Then, be the reign assigned ye,
And sway me from your misty, shadowy zone!
My bosom thrills, with youthful passion shaken,
From magic airs that round your march awaken.

* * * * *

"And grasps me now a long-unwonted yearning
For that serene and solemn Spirit-Land.
My song, to faint Æolian murmurs turning,
Sways like a harp-string by the breezes fanned.
I thrill and tremble; tear on tear is burning,
And the stern heart is tenderly unmanned.
What I possess, I see far distant lying,
And what I lost grows real and undying."

To the mystical and much disputed Second Part the literal and lineal method of translation is specially adapted, and serves to preserve the fantastic nature of the original. Herein Taylor had the gift and knowledge which enabled him to succeed where others had failed. He felt his ability, and perhaps too readily estimated the greatness of this part by the difficulties he mastered. The best poet, other things being equal, is the best translator: witness the contemporary blank verse Homers—of Bryant, the poet, and Lord Derby, the learned amateur. Opinions may differ as to the merits of Taylor's handling of the First Part of "Faust," but with respect to that of the Second there is little question. It is unlikely that any great English poet soon will undertake to excel it. Swinburne could make the venture, were he sufficiently a German. Carlyle would have made a noble translation, for he is essentially a poet, despite his outcry against verse. Shelley, had he essayed a complete version and made his studies accordingly, might have left us the ideal translation—for he was the ideal translator. His paraphrase of the "Hymn to Mercury" is, as Emerson would say, more original than the original. His overture of "Faust" is in some way more grand and rapturous than Taylor's. His lines breathe the very spirit of that "astonishing chorus" of archangels. His "Walpurgis Night" is full of enchantment—too soon the waving ended of that magic wand.

Taylor's notes and commentary are the best we have, learned and intelligible, equally marked by poetic feeling and good sense. His critical views of the Second Part should be more authoritative than those of others less conversant with the subject and less truly poets. He approves of Lewes's

statement: "I have little sympathy with that philosophy of art which consists in translating Art into Philosophy, and I trouble myself very little with 'considerations on the Idea.'" In disputed passages, he seeks for light from his master's other writings, rather than from German and English commentators. The result of this course is excellent, and I do not believe that any other translator has so nearly reproduced both the text and spirit of Goethe's life-long work.

IV.

AN art-poem, "The Picture of St. John," was published by Taylor some years after the appearance of "The Poet's Journal." His talent for drawing has been mentioned; he was exceedingly fond of art, and not a few of our best-known painters were his chosen and attached friends. The new poem was dedicated to this gentle brotherhood,—to the lamented Kensett; to McEntee, the studious and pathetic interpreter of our autumnal skies and woodlands; to S. R. Gifford, lover of golden skies and falling streams; to Eastman Johnson, Church, and Colman and Whittredge. The theme may be termed the development of an artist's powers through experience of the joy and suffering of life. The tale is Italian, as regards both feeling and incident; and the scene is laid in Italy and the Alps. There are four books, of stanzas which seem a variation upon the *ottava rima*. The poet spent much time upon this work, and it has many graceful passages. But as a fresh and original conception and a charming piece of workmanship, I should prefer "Lars," the only sustained poem in narrative form which he subsequently composed. This was written about five years before his death, and I was surprised at the comparatively slight attention which it received. It is in pure and even blank verse, and is a finely conceived poem, executed in a style worthy of the conception—which could not always be said of Taylor's works. In "Lars" he took a subject quite within his powers, and realized his ideal. In one sense the theme is American; the scenes change from the Norwegian coast to the Quaker borders of the Delaware, and the author thoroughly understood the landscape, manners, and sentiment of the two regions. The atmosphere is, by turns, fragrant with the balsam of Norseland firs, and thymy with the smell of new-mown fields across the western sea. A contrast between the half-savage habit of the Norse-folk

and the placid religious quality of our pastoral midland settlements is strongly and sweetly drawn. The combat with knives between the rival herdmen, Lars and Per, is a virile piece of work. Less Tennysonian and even more poetic are the idyls of Norwegian cottage life, which precede this scene. The poem is a delightful production; we have no idyl of similar length, except "Evangeline," that equals it in finish and interest. It belongs to the school of Tennyson; but "Evangeline" likewise had a model, and had the advantage of seeking popularity at an earlier time.

A subsequent collection of miscellaneous pieces—"The Home Pastorals," to which I have referred—was made by the poet. Four contemplative poems of the seasons, as observed from the porches of Cedarcroft, are exquisite of their kind, and have been undervalued; they are in English hexameter verse, for which Taylor had a good ear, and only narrative pieces in that measure obtain a popular reading. To me they seem wise, beautiful, true to nature; resembling in ease and freshness Clough's, "Bothie," and very faithful to the scenery and sentiments of the Pennsylvanian border, where

"North and south are as one in the blended
growth of the region,
One in the temper of man and ancient, inherited
habits."

I bespeak a new examination for the series. This book also contains some of the poet's best ballads; but has other lyrics quite uneven in merit. It is notable for three of the odes (exhibiting his taste for sweeping Pindaric measures) which he recited upon various public occasions in his later years.

Here it may be noted that Taylor, in some respects, though hardly in essential quality, bore a certain resemblance to Lowell. The likeness pertains to their poetic powers, themes and methods. Both poets have been varied in mood and range, have excelled in dialect-verse and in spontaneous flights of song. In the poetry of each is seen a tendency to moralize. Lowell's process of thought is the more suggestive and subtle of the two. Taylor's measures never are rugged; Lowell's often are, but the latter has sudden felicities peculiar to himself. Both have written with facility, and declined to revise their work. Frequently, in recent years, each was called upon to write and deliver odes—of which the measures have a family likeness, irrespective of their authorship. Taylor's Gettysburg ode, for the dedi-

cation of the National Monument, and his Goethe ode, are manly and heroic poems. The Shakspeare ode is less successful. In a crowning lyrical effort, he had as wide an audience as poet could desire. He was addressing not only the assemblage in Independence Square, on the 4th of July, 1876, but millions of his countrymen,—in truth, the reading world. It was a fine occasion, and all his ambition was aroused. What poet ever had a more historic opportunity? Should the verse of all his contemporaries be forgotten, as is not unlikely,—a century from now, and perhaps for centuries thereafter, the first Centennial Ode will be revived and re-examined.

"The National Ode" was not unworthy of the occasion, from a conventional point of view. It was sonorous, patriotic, mindful of our traditions, full of dignity and rhetorical power. As such it was received. But it was not the one new, bold, original production, which appeals alike to the wise and the unlearned, rouses the imagination, imprints itself upon the memory of all who read it, and becomes a lasting portion of national literature. Marvell's ode "On the Return of the Lord Protector," and Lowell's "Commemoration Ode" are poems of this kind; in sooth, Taylor's effort, coming after the latter, demanded all his courage. A friend urged him to adopt some regular stanzaic form, however complicated, or else to write his poem in blank verse or rhymed-heroic,—either of these measures being more likely than the irregular Pindaric to touch and hold the popular heart. It was added that the simplest vehicle would best convey, on such an occasion, the noblest thought. I suppose that his adverse decision was guided partly by precedent, more by his instinctive sense of an ability to compose and recite musically his Pindaric verse. He did deliver his ode with superb effect, and felt the occasion in every fiber of his mold. Americans refer without distrust to this poem, issued in so many forms, but few recall its phrases; and it must be acknowledged that one only of Lowell's elaborate odes really has succeeded in fastening itself upon the public mind.

v.

ONE more division of Taylor's manifold productions remains for consideration,—to wit, his dramatic works. Of these, two are philosophical studies cast in dramatic form; the intervening one, however, is a five-act play, the interest being human rather than

speculative. This I will look at first, and separately.

"The Prophet: A Tragedy," has certain claims to attention. This work, a closet-drama perhaps as easily adapted for the stage as one or two of Browning's, was an honest attempt to treat dramatically a modern and peculiar American theme, and to make what could be made of it. Hints are taken from the early history of Mormonism, but the central figure, instead of being a vulgar impostor like Joseph Smith, is a simple and pious young farmer, such a man as Taylor's own country might have produced; intelligent withal, but the victim of the religious ecstasy that comes to one without knowledge of books and the world. The devices of shrewder comrades and the jealousy of women unite to deceive him, and to persuade him, by signs and miracles, of his own prophetic mission. The incidents follow naturally; the scenes being laid first in New England, then in the far West, whither the Prophet and his followers have gone to found a sacred city. Internal plots and external foes bring about a catastrophe, ending with the death of the hero of the play.

The highest form of poetry is the drama, for it includes *all other forms*, and should combine them in their greatest excellence. At its best it is the supreme flower of the literature of any nation, and demands the poet's rarest and most comprehensive genius. It scarcely proffers a method which he can fully master, late in life, after years of lyrical or idyllic minstrelsy. The dramatic instinct must be born in him: again, his formative period must find him in a region where a dramatic tendency already fills the air. Otherwise his work as a playwright, like that of Tennyson or Longfellow, must be accomplished by an artificial effort, and will lack the touch that makes the whole world kin. Even Browning, with his immense dramatic resources, early found a greater hindrance than his own subjectivity in the non-sympathetic spirit of his people and time. But I shall not here discuss the present condition of dramatic feeling in our own country, nor the omens of the future. These are matters for separate consideration. "The Prophet" failed, in view of its author's theme and purpose, not solely from his lack of early dramatic practice,—his way of feeling and expression always having been in the reverse direction,—but from causes which hardly could be overcome. Such a plot might be treated idealistically,

by giving the widest range to imagination, fearing no extravagance, creating one's own facts and atmosphere, and the result might be a great dramatic poem if not an acting drama; or it might be treated realistically,—the course which Taylor naturally pursued. To insure success by the latter mode, the time and events of a drama must be poetic in themselves. In this story of our own time, there is, perforce, a lack of the illusive and entrancing atmosphere of the far-away past. That which is too modern and familiar seems commonplace. The time may come when as much shall be made of the Mormon episode as of the traditions of the Druses or of John of Leyden; at present it furnishes a store of clap-trap to melodramatic playwrights who derive from it substantial gains.

Taylor drew his personages with skill, but their simple and unheroic character was against the passion of the play. The work illustrates the importance of certain canons. First, nobility of theme has much to do with the value of art; secondly, realism is not the chief end in matters of design. There is truth—and truth; the truth of what is or has been, and the truth of what may be. While the dispositions of the two women, Rhoda and Livia, are finely contrasted, the tone of the whole play is purposely restrained,—too much so, in my opinion; the general style is bald, prosaic even in the people's hymns and songs. Aldrich suggested the theme to his friend as a good one for treatment; and, with all its lack of freedom, this play as a literary work is far more worth attention than such a romanza as the "St. Abe" of Mr. Buchanan,—which had a wider reading when it first appeared.

The lack of interest felt in "The Prophet" deterred Taylor from further experiments of the kind. His other dramas, therefore, were purely ideal. "The Masque of the Gods" presents that side of his nature which was most exalted and aspiring. His religious temper, it has been seen, was bred under other influences than those which restrict the faith of many poets. He was a believer in direct inspiration, but a questioner of revelation. The creed of the Progressive Quakers was liberal and humane, and the boy grew up to regard men of all races as his brethren, and every form of worship as acceptable to an Unknown God whom he himself addressed in the spirit of Pope's "Universal Prayer." This sense was strengthened by his travels and studies,

and his religion became broader than any man's theology. "The Masque of the Gods"—a title with a tinge of quaintness below the dignity of the subject—is a drama of three dialogues, managed in a severe and classical fashion. The personages are all those greater deities whom men have worshiped in the historic advance from barbarism to Christianity. First, the Rocks, Caverns, Serpents, Wolves, the Mountains, the Rivers and the infinite Sea, discourse among themselves. They are followed by Brahma, Ormuzd, Manito, Baal, Apollo, Jove,—even by Elohim and Immanuel, the Gods of the Mosaic and Christian dispensations. The motive of the sublime dialogue is a recognition by these majestic divinities of a God beyond and above them all, of whom they are but the servants and the successive types. Such a poem might have been written in one language or in another. It is abstract, universal, not in any sense a home production. Of course it would find a limited reading. Yet it is lofty and pure, written in blank verse with lyrical interludes, on a sustained key, and more compact than most works of the kind. It approaches as near to the highest grade as intellect and eloquence can lift such a poem. What it lacks is the unconscious flight into that empyrean where the wings move without sound and touches of flame hover at the tips of the pinions. The conception is vast, daring,—far more imaginative than its working out.

This drama, which Taylor rated high among his productions, and which is in every sense an expression of his devotion to the nobler forms of song, renders it possible for one to assert that a writer may be judged somewhat by his ideals, and that, so far as this mode of judgment is concerned, its author held a significant place in the group of American poets. It was the precursor—the overture, we may say—to the work that was his "swan-song," the larger drama which he lived to complete, and of which a fair broad copy reached him but a day before the lyre dropped from his hand forever. "Of his last work," wrote his bereaved wife,—"*sein Schwanen Gesang*, as I call it,—as I would call it in my mind involuntarily, long before I knew he was deadly ill, he only saw one copy, and that of the English edition."

A strange interest belongs to the drama of "Prince Deukalion." The poet deferred his serious work upon the life of Goethe, that he might be sure of completing this one

poem which he strove to make his best. The result is fresh in the public mind, and has been the topic of extended and searching criticism. Attention may be directed to the artistic skill with which the drama is composed, to the dignified and sounding qualities of the main body of its verse, and to the varying interludes marked by the author's lyrical felicities in their maturest range. Even here his expression retains the mannerism which grew out of the limited vocabulary prevailing when he learned his art in youth. Certain words and effects are of too frequent recurrence; but, allowing for all this, "Prince Deukalion" will bear examination for its excess of rhythmical beauty. America has produced few poems so admirable for richness and variety of measures. The influence of "Faust" is visible in its handling; but if Taylor herein was not the master, he was a chosen pupil sitting near the throne. Objection has been made to the philosophical motive of the drama: it is said that the personages are mere abstractions, and that a writer should not aim at the poetical rendering of what is a metaphysical speculation. In respect to this debarment of intellectual purpose from the sphere of the poet, we may answer that the latter rightly covers every province of beauty, passion, thought. Let us, then, ask whether the subject is treated didactically and prosaically, or with imagination and in the true artistic spirit. In the latter case both the process and the result are quite legitimate. If these be not so, the greatest poets are the greatest offenders: we can not outlaw Lucretius, Shelley, Goethe, Tennyson, Hugo. The whole question is one of quality; there are no embers so dead that the true poet may not blow them into a flame.

The subject of "Prince Deukalion" is one that lay near Taylor's heart, and to him was the most elevating of poetic themes. It is, perhaps, too soon to estimate the value of the work, but, unless it is approached in the sincere and tender spirit with which it was written, it will not be judged aright. The argument is the progress of mankind, from the ignominy and suffering belonging to the youth of the world, to the golden age of the future. The thought and treatment of the drama are entirely characteristic of the author. The early portion is unquestionably fine. Many passages in the middle and latter sections show a falling off, due, it may be, to the languor of illness and to the pressure of the instinct which made the

poet hasten to the completion of his task, but at the close he again rose to a noble height. It is easy to select an example of the vigorous handling of the structural verse. His Poet declares:

"I am a voice, and cannot more be still
Than some high tree that takes the whirlwind's stress

Upon the summit of a lonely hill.
Be thou a wooing breeze, my song is fair;
Be thou a storm, it pierces far and shrill,
And grows the spirit of the starless air.
Such voices were, and such must ever be,
Omnipotent as love, unforced as prayer,
And poured round life as round its isles the sea!"

In the fourth act, the words of Agathon are an expression of the sentiment and hopeful philosophy which animated Taylor's whole career;

"But I *accept*—even all this conscious life
Gives in its fullest measure—gladness, health,
Clean appetite, and wholeness of my claim
To knowledge, beauty, aspiration, power!
Joy follows action, here; and action bliss,
Hereafter!"

But at last, and even here, it seemed as if—to change the line of Webster—the years of this loyal and eager poet had felicities too many. His rest was not to be that upon which he counted. Had he drawn his own horoscope it could not have appeared more perfect. He went again to the land of his earliest pilgrimage, encouraged with honors and affection, and with the best opportunities for the production of a work to which his own choice and the desire of the entire republic of letters strongly impelled him. It all seemed part of the fitness of things. Hereafter, he was to have calm and leisure for a purely literary life. But a shadow fell, and grew apace—the very irony of fate. Within the year his soul was required of him, and one more broken shaft was added to the endless colonnade by which we testify the incompleteness of this our earthly life, and express the pity of it.

Shortly after Taylor's death, a fellow-writer, who knew him well, spoke to me of his literary career. "A man so aspiring and sagacious," this critic said, "could be satisfied with nothing less than the highest achievement, the soundest professional judgment in his favor." Recognizing the point thus made, I would not accept it as a test of his genius. It seemed to me that it was his fortune, however wide his popular reputation, to be underestimated by his profes-

sional compeers. His gift was genuine and inherent, but it speedily became too much diffused; he strove to survey too large a precinct, and it was surprising how far, in more than one direction, he made his lines extend. With all his facility and purpose, he found himself in a too arduous struggle between the duty of the hour and the still higher work fashioned after "the pattern which was shewed him in the Mount." He bravely set himself to carry out an almost impossible plan of life. His manliness in this and other respects we all concede. If he hesitated to boldly follow his poetic instincts, his courage was absolute in the expression of convictions, and in reliance upon his own energies for all he got from the world. During his experience of a time and region which made Poe a weakling,—almost an Ishmaelite,—with what pluck and heartiness Taylor faced the situation, until it seemed as if the very god of strength took pleasure

in befriending him! After all, he had some right to count upon length of years, and to shape his plan accordingly. He grew in taste and judgment as he grew older, and even his devotion of so much time to hack-work was not without its requitals. He led a singularly happy life throughout, and the cloud foretokening its close was but of brief duration. He was fond of festivals, of joy; he "warmed both hands before the fire of life." More was given to him than was taken away, and his memory is something to dwell upon with pleasure, not with pain. The volumes of his song are left to us, the bequest of that which he thought the choicest product of his years. No one who would acquaint himself with American poetry can overlook Bayard Taylor's share of it. Those who would understand its growth, or predict its future, must bear in mind the generation for which he wrote and the story of his efforts and environment.